



STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS (2023)

Welcome to the City of El Cajon and this year's State of the City.

We gather at El Cajon's Courtyard Marriott. This property represents the City's economic development efforts and is an example of partnership. With City investment and working with the private sector, we were able to attract and build this fantastic property—East County's first business-class hotel.

Throughout this evening's address, you will see how the City and others collaborate to make our community a better place.

Before I talk about what has happened and where we are going, I wanted to recognize a few individuals. First of all, I'm grateful for the City Council that represents the four council districts in our City—Deputy Mayor Steve Goble, Councilmember Gary Kendrick, Councilmember Michelle Metschel, and Councilmember Phil Ortiz. Can you four please stand and let's give them a round of applause?

I appreciate their leadership and the way they represent the City.

As we look around the state, we see examples of dysfunctional city councils. The City of El Cajon is different. As a city council, we may not always agree on every issue we face. However, we treat each other with respect and dignity. I hope that we continue this tradition of professionalism, putting our residents and community first. Given the current representatives of our City, I have no doubt that we will continue to be effective.

I also want to recognize any other elected officials and their representatives that are here this evening. I also want to thank and recognize the El Cajon residents that serve on the Planning Commission, the Personnel Commission, and the Prop O Oversight Committee.

If you belong to one of these organizations, please stand so we can acknowledge and thank you.

Lastly, I want to thank our residents, our businesses, and those that are involved in El Cajon. Your spirit and your sense of community make El Cajon an exceptional place.

State of the City

I am pleased to announce that the state of El Cajon is outstanding. The City's finances are in order, the City is taking on the toughest challenges in the region (sometimes all by ourselves), and we continue to be a leader of innovation in California.

2022

This past year has been an adventure, to say the least. Because we only have a few minutes together, let me highlight just a few topics.

Homelessness – We know that THE number one concern of our residents is homelessness—it's on everyone's minds. Especially given the events from earlier this month.

I will come back and talk about this later.

Wherever you are in San Diego County, it's hard not to recognize that this region has real challenges. We all know it, but very few are willing to address the root causes of homelessness.

I'm pleased that the City of El Cajon has been a leader when it comes to homelessness.

Here are just four examples:

- El Cajon piloted the "A Way Back Home" program with the Salvation Army. Now, this program is offered throughout the County.
- El Cajon was one of the first cities to provide housing navigation which is now replicated in many cities in the region.
- There are very few homeless shelters in this County. El Cajon has several, including the East County Transitional Living Center, which the City has financially supported since 2005.
- El Cajon provides a model for how to support an emergency cabin program. This program is scalable and can be employed in every jurisdiction in San Diego County.

We all know that the "one size fits all" approach to solving homeless does not work.

This is why we offer about a dozen different programs that have real impacts. Our focus—getting individuals off the street and into permanent housing—it is our number one goal.

Unfortunately, as a city, we are not an island. We operate within a County, and a State with leadership that feel homelessness is an acceptable lifestyle alternative. Here in El Cajon, we do not. Primarily because we believe it is profoundly uncompassionate to leave people to languish on the streets, trapped in their addictions and mental illness.

This prevalent belief that homelessness is an accepted way of life is an indictment on our society and how we view our brothers and sisters. We need more compassion, but we also need real solutions that focus on the root problems of homelessness.

The average person would point to mental illness and/or drug addiction as the reason many are homeless. However, California's leaders of the homeless industrial complex will tell you otherwise. They will say it is solely a lack of affordable housing and a financial issue.

While we clearly need more housing, it is far more than that. I spent years working in the emergency department of a hospital, dealing with those in mental crisis and on drugs. I can attest that the "average person's" explanation is far more accurate and credible than the so-called experts and the majority of politicians that run our County and state.

Sure, we could give someone a house and allow them to continue a slow death of drug use. But this is not a solution. This is not compassion. This is not acceptable.

The City's success over the past few years is because of our amazing partners.

- Through the East County Transitional Living Center, we found emergency housing for 498 individuals last year. Many of these folks are now on a path to overcoming their addictions, which kept them on the streets for many years.
- Through our partnership with Home Start, we helped navigate 59 individuals off the streets and into temporary housing and 119 individuals into permanent housing.
- With The Salvation Army, we have helped reunite 27 individuals with their families last year.
- And through the AMIKAS emergency cabins at Meridian Baptist Church, we are able to give homeless mothers a real chance in life. This program is far more than window dressing. This program can make permanent changes for generations.

If you are here tonight and are a part of one of these organizations, please stand so we can publically thank you for your service to our community.

As you may know, the City has zero tolerance for illegal camping and illegal activity.

Through cleanup efforts this last year alone, we've removed 90 tons of debris left in drainage canals, streets, alleyways, sidewalks, and parks, mostly from homeless encampments. I would like to thank the City staff that take care of this day in and day out. I recognize that this job is taxing—both emotionally and physically—my

deepest appreciation to these men and women.

Much of the City's success is because our residents report illegal dumping and encampments through the City's mobile phone app. Residents—keep up the great work being our eyes and ears. This helps keep our neighborhoods clean.

Other Accomplishments – Believe it or not, we worked on more than just homelessness in 2022. This past year, the City:

- Paved or maintained 73 streets,
- Installed 34 street lights in neighborhoods,
- Developed the concept of the Nurse Navigator pilot program—the first in the State of California,
- Was awarded the San Diego Union Tribune's "Top Place to Work"—the only City in the County to receive this recognition, and
- We developed the idea of an urban gardening program—I will talk more about this in a few minutes.

Economic Development – in addition to all of that, the City Council adopted the City's first Economic Development Strategic Plan. This plan gives the City a path forward to ensure we create good-paying jobs for those that live here and create the revenue base needed to support City services, such as additional public safety and neighborhood revitalization.

Public Safety – I am also extremely proud of our Police and Fire Departments. I would like to ask everyone involved in public safety to please stand. I would also like to acknowledge Police Chief Mike Moulton and Fire Chief Bent Koch.

Through our positive workplace culture and the support we have given our public safety personnel, we continue to attract the best and the brightest. We have not reduced our hiring standards, yet we continue to attract amazing men and women to provide vital services to our residents. Last year alone, the City brought over 12 officers or deputies from other police departments—another example of our leadership in the region.

Sales Tax Measure – Let me make one last comment on 2022. I think it's fair to say that our biggest disappointment of the past year was the failed sales tax measure to replace the current ½ cent sales tax, set to expire in 2029. We were unable to convey the importance of this measure to fund vital City services and programs. But, I think we learned some important lessons, and I commit that we will do a better job understanding the needs of our residents. Also, if we move forward with another measure, I believe it needs more taxpayer protections, and we have to explain the need more effectively.

I look forward to having this conversation with our City Council and our community in the months to come.

The Future

Moving into 2023, I am excited for this year. We are already seeing progress in the City in just the last few months.

About a month ago, I had the privilege of meeting with my colleagues as part of our annual goal-setting workshop. We identified five critical priorities for the City, which include:

- City Beautification,
- Citizen Engagement,
- Economic Development,
- Homelessness, and
- Public Safety.

Let me just touch on a few of the goals we are working on in 2023.

Economic Development – last year, we saw lots of success in the area of Economic Development. 2023 will be even better. As I mentioned, we completed our first-ever Economic Development Strategic Plan. Additionally, we increased the amount of our economic development budget from \$4M to \$5M. This will allow us to create "direct-to-business" funding opportunities for important projects and allow the City to initiate public-private projects that will have significant economic and employment impacts to our community.

We recognize the age-old adage that "time is money," and we continue our long-standing commitment to be the most business-friendly community. Our City Council is dedicated to reducing regulation and remaining one of the only cities to not impose development impact fees.

Finances – In addition to this economic growth, I am pleased to say that we will continue to have a balanced budget. The City Council's commitment to prudent financial planning results in a general reserves of over \$60 million.

Increase Communications & Engagement Efforts – In 2023, we will strive to increase our communication with our community and foster more engagement from our residents. I am excited that the City is taking bold steps to accomplish this. For example, we will continue with a bi-annual newsletter, but will add a monthly e-newsletter as well.

We are already introducing more videos to engage more effectively with our residents. Please let me share just two short videos. The first is a video about the City's urban gardening program, and then a video that highlights our amazing Police Department.

[SHOW VIDEOS]

In our commitment to interactive City communication, we are hosting four City Council workshops about homelessness. These workshops begin on April 4th and will be held on different dates and times so everyone may have an opportunity to attend. I hope to see all of you there.

Homelessness – Speaking of homelessness, let me just say that the City of El Cajon will continue to provide innovative solutions and be a leader in the region. I also call on my fellow San Diego County citizens that we demand conversations about the impacts of mental illness and drug addiction on the homeless.

I call on the County of San Diego and the Regional Task Force on Homelessness to give more attention to these root causes and provide assistance to cities that are striving to address this serious challenge.

As you all know, over the past few weeks, we are learning more about alleged sexual assaults that happened in one of our motels. Who were the perpetrators of this abhorrent crime? They were two registered sex offenders being housed in motels and paid for with County money.

Months ago, this City Council and our staff sounded the warning call to County leaders about the impacts of these programs. Instead of helping us, they attempted to use the power of the State of California to silence us.

Just a few hours ago, I am proud that the El Cajon City Council took bold and innovative actions to take our community back. I want to thank them for their leadership. Clearly, El Cajon will not be silenced, and we will fight for the safety and protection of our residents.

Public Safety – Let me end on this note. The City Council and I want to make El Cajon the best place for our public safety professionals to work. We want them to feel valued and supported—it is something we strive for every day. I love hearing when our police officers take the time to shoot hoops with our youth.

I love when I hear of residents pulling up to a police officer or our firefighters at a stop light and gesturing to roll down the window, not to curse at them (which sadly happens in other communities), but to say "thank you" and "God bless you."

We truly live in a special place with special residents and enormous opportunities.

My friends, thank you for coming to this evening's event. Congratulations to our community honorees and for all of you that do so much to make El Cajon a great place to call home.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bill Weiss". The signature is stylized with a large, looped "B" and a cursive "Weiss".